

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS
MASSACHUSETTS MARITIME ACADEMY

For delivery by
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Thank you, Admiral Bresnahan for your kind introduction.

Good afternoon to the distinguished guests on the platform . . . to the parents, relatives and friends of the graduates . . . and, most especially . . . good afternoon and congratulations to the members of the Massachusetts Maritime Academy's last graduating class of the 20th century.

It is with some trepidation that I stand before a graduating class, to give advice on your new lives, to share experiences that may be relevant to your future, or just give fair warning on what may lie ahead.

A few wise speakers have been able to provide advice, comfort, or even a dash of cold water, in wondrous, and mercifully short, ways.

I don't know if I can be as profound, but I hope to be brief.

One of the most brief, but eloquent speakers in history was Winston Churchill. At one such ceremony, his remarks lasted 20 seconds. His advice:

"Never give in, never give in.
never, never, never, never
In nothing, great or small, large or petty
Never give in,
Except to convictions of honor and good sense"

Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott once shared with a graduating class this advice that worked well for him:

"If you have the good sense to keep up with your roommates," he said, "your own careers could take quite an interesting turn." His roommate at Oxford was a kid from Arkansas named Bill Clinton.

And, let me share the words of wisdom offered at my own graduation, as best I remember them:

"So you're graduating? What's your rush? You still don't know anything and there are no jobs out there anyway."

Sound advice from each of them. That last one was particularly true during the year of my graduation, when the prospects for employment were slim.

Things are somewhat different now, with the nation's economy in the midst of a 96-month long economic boom and unemployment and inflation at 30-year lows. Things are certainly different in the maritime area. Not perfect, but, I believe that the maritime world is improving and for all the right reasons.

First of all, we are at the beginning of a real public awareness of the maritime transportation system in this nation. We here today know that ocean shipping brings us 95 percent of the goods that come to our shores. Just as importantly, this nation's exports largely go by ship.

We may take for granted the notion that the nation's maritime transportation system is vital to the economic well being of the nation.

However, for the first time in a long while, there is a glimmer of recognition of this fact by the public at large.

That recognition is reflected in Congress' support for our maritime industries. This includes support for programs like the Maritime Security Program, which provides funds to U.S.-flag ship owners so the United

States has access to commercial ships in case of national emergency . . . and the Maritime Administration's Title XI program, which provides loan guarantees to build ships, barges and tugs in U.S. shipyards or to modernize those yards.

Another hopeful sign is the introduction in Congress of several bills to provide U.S.-flag ship owners and seamen the kind of tax incentives other nations provide their merchant marine force.

Secondly, there is the recognition that the maritime system can help alleviate our problems of congestion on the nation's highways, the capacity-constrained rail system and our crowded skies.

The increasing interest in ferries to transport people to work is just one manifestation of this new recognition. More than 25 ferries now ply the waters between New York and New Jersey.

A California water transit plan foresees 28 ferry terminals served by 70 vessels starting as early as five years from now. Other states, like Hawaii, are planning for the use of ferries or, like Alaska, planning to increase the use of its ferry system.

Recognition of the maritime system as an alternative to highways and railways will increase with time. Even now, people are planning to use ships to take cargo down the I-95 corridor -- thus reducing the congestion that is all a lot of us see of the State of New Jersey.

Likewise, there are plans to use roll on / roll off ships to take cargo from Galveston, Texas to Mexico, thus bypassing the unbelievable congestion at Laredo, Texas. The "choke" points of our transportation system will demand more maritime solutions.

A third reason for my optimism about the maritime system is the promise of "intermodalism". Intermodalism can be defined as the "seamless" transfer of cargo from one transportation mode to another. Intermodalism is the realization that all of our transportation modes must be equally engaged in moving people and freight in order for the nation to have an efficient, effective and well-rounded economy.

This concept is increasing its hold on transportation. Evidence of this is found in the establishment of the Office of Intermodalism at the Department of Transportation back in Washington, D.C. . . in the provision of funds for ferries in laws pertaining to highways and transit development . . . and in the realization of the transportation modes themselves that

getting goods and people to their destinations quickly, cheaply and safely are the only requirements.

And so, Class of 1999, all of this supports your choice of a career - - a career in maritime transportation either at sea or ashore.

And all of this supports the need for this institution to continue its mission of providing the best merchant seamen in the world - - a mission it has successfully pursued for these many years. It is a mission that is now, more than ever, so necessary to the well being of this island nation.

As a people, we always have looked at the ocean around us as a bridge to opportunity rather than a barrier.

Even before this nation was formed, the colonists knew that the sailor was an essential figure in American commerce. The might of the British passed Stamp and Sugar acts struck at the American seaports. It is not surprising, therefore, that the fiercest calls for independence were centered in the ports.

During the Civil War, both sides recognized the importance of seaborne cargo, as is evidenced by the naval resources devoted to blockading the ports of the southern states . . . as well as by the number of sunken blockade runners which lie from Bermuda to North Carolina.

Beginning with the 1880s and for 40 years thereafter, almost all of the 23,000,000 immigrants to America came by sea on commercial vessels.

World War II saw an expanded merchant marine, an expansive theater of operations, with runs from South Africa to Trinidad and from New Caledonia to California, and a casualty list of almost 7,000 officers and men.

Two decades later merchant mariners would deliver goods to the U.S. forces in Vietnam.

And, 30 years after that, 80 percent of the supplies delivered to the Persian Gulf in Desert Storm would also be delivered by the U.S.-flag fleet and the men and women who sailed those ships.

Today, while the challenges for the merchant marine may not be as dramatic, they are no less vital. The goal, your goal, hasn't changed. You are charged with getting the goods to the right people at the right time. What has changed, however, is what you will need to know in order to do your job.

In addition to celestial navigation and marlinespike seamanship, you will need knowledge of global positioning satellites and intermodal transportation.

Knowledge of logistics and the environment will be required as well as communications and engineering. In addition, it is a sure bet that you will find yourselves earning several certificates attesting to your competency in other areas or skill sets.

For all that, most people outside your orbit still will not appreciate what you do. So, to be absolutely clear, you will be expected to do more, to know more, to take some risk in your employment and to be largely unappreciated by your fellow citizens, at least in the short term.

To the inevitable question: "Why?" The answer is because you are critical to the maritime transportation system and the system is critical to the country's future. We must have a strong merchant marine to protect our seaborne commerce and the nation's future.

There can be no substitute for you, your classmates, and many more like you.

Given my age I suppose it was inevitable that those who know me have accused me of spending much too much time in front of a movie screen. Many of us have a memory of a movie that has stayed with us for years after the first viewing. (I have a friend who can recite the entire script of "The Magnificent Seven".)

My family recalls the 1949 movie "The Sands of Iwo Jima" as the reason for my brother's enlistment in the United States Marine Corps some 20 years later. And of course, entire generations of people changed their bathing habits after viewing Alfred Hitchcock's "Psycho" or "Jaws."

Even today, in the multimedia utopia of the Internet, VCR's, CD's, and DVD's, movies can still affect us deeply. For me, one such recent movie was "Saving Private Ryan," Steven Spielberg's epic of an eight-man patrol given the job of bringing one paratrooper out from the Normandy beachhead and sending him home.

That "movie moment" came at the end: the scene when the now-elderly Private Ryan kneels at the Normandy grave of the man who got him home and tells him that he has tried to be true to the life he was given, that he has tried to be the man he was expected to become.

Of course, there are those who complain about the movie's "romantic" ending. I disagree with that view, but that issue is irrelevant to the point I make here.

Because my point here is to ask you -- each of you -- to give someone a life.

I don't mean you have to go into combat and physically save someone. Nor do I mean that you have to give money to every homeless person you see until you can't pay your own rent. What I ask doesn't require money at all. Nor does it require a lot of time. But it is no less important for its ease.

What I ask is that you "mentor" someone, actually several someones, over the course of your lives. The singer Bruce Springsteen said it best talking about the Beatles: He said,

"The Beatles opened doors. If I could ever do that for somebody...

That's the best. Can't do anything better than that."

That is what I ask of you. Open a door for someone else.

You don't have to wait until you're in a job or have climbed whatever ladder to success to begin mentoring. I'm told that Oprah Winfrey got her first "break" when a Seventh Grade teacher noticed her reading during lunch and got her a scholarship to a better school.

Each of us can do what that teacher did. Notice those people you find talented; encourage those who could use a "break."

Your part may be nothing more than encouraging someone uncertain about applying to this school, or that job. But that "nothing more" may be the spark that allows someone to find a passion; that sets that passion aflame; or even allows that person to realize that there is a wider, more exciting world out there than he or she ever dreamed possible.

In return for your gesture, you may stumble on someone who will come to you for advice, bring you new ways of looking at the world, and stay to be a friend.

At the very least you could find yourself being touted as a roll model or the one who provided the spark to another who went on to accomplish some great thing.

In short, you may get to touch the future -- your future as well as mine.

Finally, I'd like to leave you with this thought to take home. Understand that friends come and go, but with a precious few, you should hold on. Work hard to stay with them, no matter where your paths lead you, because the

older you get, the more you need the people who knew you when you were young.

But know this: Wherever you go and whatever you do, the hopes and prayers of all of us here today go with you. You are the future. We are looking for you to stay the course. Go forward into the 21st century knowing that you are one of the finest in our maritime industry. I wish you all Godspeed. Thank you.